



## **Brother John Elway**

### **Denver Bronco-Hall of Fame Quarterback ©**

by Dr. Ivan M. Tribe, KCT, KYCH, 33°

During the first half of the twentieth century, the number of Masonry's famous figures from the world of athletics were many and numerous. With the passage of time and membership declines in recent decades, the number has declined. In the realm of football, such names as Red Grange, Don Hutson, and Glenn "Pop" Warner highlighted Brother Jerry Erikson's list of "Fraternal Footballers." In the immediate past generation, one gridiron name that stands out is Denver Bronco quarterback, Brother John Elway, who earned his way into the National Football League Hall of Fame during a professional career that extended from 1983 through 1999. John Albert Elway, Jr., was born in Port Angeles, Washington, on June 28, 1960, the son of a football coach. One could almost say that the game was in his blood. A grandfather had once played on a team that had opposed the Carlisle Indians and Jim Thorpe. His father had been a quarterback at Washington State until injuries curtailed his playing career. In addition to the senior Elway known as "Jack," the family included mother Janet and two sisters, Lee Ann who was older and Jana who was John's twin (deceased in 2002). The family lived at various locales in Washington and Montana, as Jack Elway's coaching positions changed. About the time John entered high school, the father became head coach at Cal State Northridge (later at San Jose State), and the family settled in Granada Hills, California, which had become known for a stellar high school football program. As a quarterback at Granada Hills High, the teenage John compiled a record that included 5,711 yards passing for some 49 touchdowns. In addition to being academically strong, John excelled in basketball and baseball and was drafted by the Kansas City Royals. Nonetheless, he opted for college, choosing Stanford over both Southern California and his father's San Jose State.

Presumably, he chose Stanford because of their passing game, and he could also play baseball there..



Leland Stanford, Jr. University was hardly a super team during John Elway's college days, but he nonetheless proved himself to be an outstanding competitor and a great quarterback. He moved into the starting position as a sophomore and showed his mettle by completing 248 passes for 2,884 yards and 27 touchdowns, leading among other things, to a Stanford upset over Oklahoma. Coaches of rival teams including those of U.C.L.A and Southern Cal began comparing him to some of the game's all-time greats. His junior year came as something of a disappointment as the team had a 4-11 record. Still, Elway's individual statistics were such that most players would envy them: 214 completions for a total of 2,674 yards and 20 touchdowns.

John bounced back as a senior with 262 completions for 3,242 yards and 24 touchdowns. Stanford only won five games, but their quarterback managed to finish second in balloting for the Heisman Trophy behind Herschel Walker of Georgia. Stanford's mediocre 20-23 during Elway's college career may have kept him from winning the coveted award, but he still entered the NFL draft as a top prospect. As an economic major, he maintained a B average in the classroom and did well enough on the baseball diamond that he signed with the New York Yankee organization, having two good seasons with Oneonta in their minor league system.

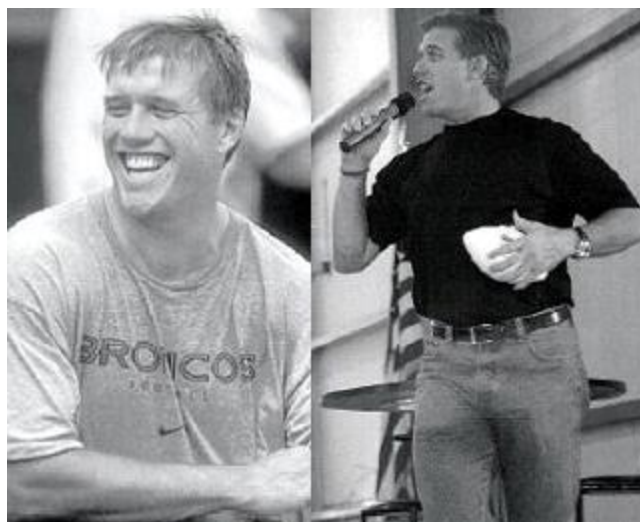
Still, football had been John Elway's best sport and the game that attracted the most attention. The Baltimore Colts chose him as their number one draft choice. However, the Baltimore franchise had no appeal for either John or his advisor father, and he demanded to be traded or else he would simply opt for a baseball career. After a standoff the Colts management agreed to trade his contract rights to the Denver Broncos. With all the media attention that accompanied his arrival in Colorado, the press considered his performance less than spectacular. The rookie quarterback spent much of the season as understudy to regular Steve DeBerg, starting on occasion. Playing roughly half the time, Elway completed 123 passes

for 1,663 yards and 7 touchdowns and carrying the ball 28 times for 146 yards and scoring a single TD. The next year he got more playing time and improved his record.

The third year with the Broncos 1985-proved to be the one where the Elway charm on the field came of age. He led the league in attempted and completed passes, which gave his team 3,891 yards and 22 touchdowns. His rushing totals added 253 more yards. His team led the league in total passing and total offense. It could be the first of seven consecutive seasons in which the Stanford alumnus would pass for more than 3,000 yards and carry the ball for at least another 230. During this remarkable streak, one achievement eluded the star quarterback, and that was leading the Broncos to a victory in the Super Bowl. Three times the Denver team reached the pinnacle, only to falter, losing to the New York Giants, the Washington Redskins, and finally the San Francisco 49ers. The latter loss proved especially humiliating as the 49ers rolled over the hapless Broncos by a score of 55 to 10. Although John Elway scored the only Denver touchdown, it hardly came as a consolation prize in which to take much pride. Many years would pass before another opportunity came to the Broncos.

John Elway did have some career downswings. One came in the first part of the 1989 season when he was somewhat off his game. The press launched a series of tasteless attacks accusing him of being stingy with restaurant tips, and a Denver newspaper complained about the quality of Halloween candy passed out to trick-or-treaters. Later in the seasons, his records improved, and while his numbers were down somewhat, he still managed to surpass 3,000 yards in passing totals. The ungrateful critics simply turned their venom on others.

John Elway had one of his best seasons in 1993 with 348 completions, total yards passing of 4,030, and 25 touchdowns. A Super Bowl trip eluded the Broncos in this period. Former Pittsburgh Steeler quarterback, Terry Bradshaw, charged that John had been excessively coddled, first by his supporting family and second by the Denver organization. Although stung by this criticism, Elway conceded that it would be hard to be rated a truly great quarterback until his team had posted a Super Bowl victory.



By 1997 the Bronco rebuilding program began to show significant results. Their running game, led by Terrell Davis, began to compete with their always strong passing attack, and the Denver eleven was strong at every position. Finally, in Super Bowl XXXII, the time had come. In what was billed as a showdown between the John Elway led Broncos and the Brett Favre led Green Bay Packers, Denver finally came home a winner by a 31-24 score. As the bio section on the Elway web site reads: "The dark cloud of doubt that had followed from his first Super Bowl defeat onward evaporated in an unbridled celebration of vindication!" Just to prove that their Super Bowl "jinx" had vanished, the Broncos also took XXXIII in January 1999 with a 34-19 victory over the Atlanta Falcons. John Elway was named the game's "Most Valuable Player."

A few weeks after that savored victory John Elway announced his retirement. At thirty-nine he was ready to hang up his shoes. His career totals now included 4,123 completions; 51,475 yards passing; and 300 TD passes in regular season play; plus 3,407 yards rushing and 33 touchdowns scored. His playoff and Super Bowl statistics would add some 355 more completions and 4,964 yards and 27 touchdown passes. He scored six TDs in such competition. He made a formal announcement of his retirement on May 2, 1999.

John Elway may have retired from the gridiron, but he continued in a variety of business endeavors. Some of those include two restaurants in the Denver area and principal ownership of the Arena League football franchise, the Colorado Crush. At one time he owned five auto dealerships in Colorado, but he subsequently sold them. He still owns one in Ontario, California. He has also partnered with Bassett Furniture in developing certain products. In 2006 when a Pennsylvania high school student was punished-somewhat foolishly-for wearing a John Elway Denver Bronco football jersey to class by a Steeler fan-teacher, Elway sent the youth a recliner chair. As a philanthropist, he started the John Elway Foundation, which raises money for two charities that help abused children. Some have speculated a possible run for the U.S. Senate in 2008. John Elway's Masonic membership dates from February 22 and 23, 2002, when he was part of a Grand Lodge of Colorado two-day class. He passed his proficiency on June 28, 2002. He is described as a "perpetual member" of South Denver- Lodge No. 93, a status which is usually termed "a life member" in most grand jurisdictions. He has apparently not joined other Masonic bodies or otherwise been particularly active, but he does maintain a busy schedule.

In his personal life, John Elway was married to Janet Buchan, who had been a member of the girls' swimming team at Stanford, until they divorced in 2003. The couple had two daughters, Jessica and Jordan, both of whom are in college, and a son, John Albert Elway III, scheduled to graduate from high school in 2008.

John Elway's attainments on the football field speak for themselves. He ranks third among all NFL quarterbacks in passes attempted and completed, and fourth in touchdown passes. Elway entered the National Football League Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, in 2004. He is also a successful businessman and philanthropist.

Masons should not only be proud of Brother Elway but be honored that he took the time to join our fraternity.

Bibliography: Most of the biographical data on John Elway comes from the entry in Current Biography (1990) and from his web site. His Masonic record came from the staff at the Grand Lodge of Colorado.

Sir Knight Ivan M. Tribe, KCT, KYCH, 33°, and a professor emeritus of history at the University of Rio Grande, Rio Grande, Ohio, is a Past Commander of Athens Commandery No. 15, Athens, Ohio. He resides at 111 East High Street, McArthur, OH 45651-1111

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